

## CLAIMS

1. A method for providing rental service through a computer network, the method comprising:
  - assigning a collection of virtual containers to a set of users including one or more users, each virtual container in the collection being configured to identify one or more software products that are rented by users in the set; and
  - authorizing a user in the set to access a software product through the computer network based on whether the software product is identified as a rented software product in one or more virtual containers of the collection assigned to the set of users.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - identifying the rented software product in the virtual container for a rental period.
3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
  - removing the rented software product from the virtual container at the end of the rental period.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - receiving a user subscription from a user in the set of users for renting software products,
  - wherein assigning a collection of virtual containers includes assigning the collection of virtual containers according to the user subscription.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein:
  - assigning the collection of virtual containers according to the user subscription includes assigning a predetermined number of virtual containers for a subscription period.
6. The method of claim 5, further comprising:
  - canceling the assignment of the collection of virtual containers at the end of the subscription period.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the computer network includes the Internet.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the rented software product includes game software.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein the rented software product includes educational or business software.
10. The method of claim 1, wherein the rented software product includes electronic media content.
11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - acquiring information about a client system connected to the computer network for using the rented software product,
  - wherein authorizing access includes authorizing access in accordance with the acquired information.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein:
  - authorizing access in accordance with the acquired information includes denying access to the rented software product.
13. The method of claim 11, wherein:
  - acquiring information about the client system includes determining whether the client system includes one or more personal computers and digital game devices.
14. The method of claim 11, further comprising:
  - if access is authorized, providing access for the user in the set to use the rented software product such that a client portion of the rented software product runs in the client system while the user in the set uses the software product through the computer network.
15. The method of claim 14, further comprising:
  - determining the client portion of the rented software product based on the acquired information about the client system.
16. The method of claim 11, wherein:
  - acquiring information about the client system comprises acquiring information describing a connection speed of the client device through the computer network.

17. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
providing a user interface for renting software products.
18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:  
in the user interface, receiving user input selecting a software product and placing the selected software product in a virtual container of the assigned collection to be identified as rented software product.
19. The method of claim 17, further comprising:  
in the user interface, presenting a software list including one or more items, each item representing a software product for rent; and  
receiving user input selecting one or more items in the list.
20. The method of claim 19, wherein:  
receiving user input selecting one or more items in the software list includes receiving user input selecting one or more items in the software list based on one or more of genre, title, manufacturer, and system requirements.
21. The method of claim 19, wherein:  
presenting a software list includes presenting a software list based on one or more of alphabetical order of title, release date, and popularity of software products for rent.
22. The method of claim 19, wherein:  
presenting a software list includes presenting a software list based on a user profile.
23. The method of claim 1, wherein:  
assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one or more virtual containers for rentals having high priority.
24. The method of claim 1, wherein:  
assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one or more virtual containers for rentals having variable rental period.
25. The method of claim 1, wherein:  
assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one

or more virtual containers for rentals with limited content.

26. The method of claim 1, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning a limited access virtual container that one or more users in the set of users cannot use to access software product.

27. The method of claim 1, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning a multi-player virtual container to be associated with multi-player games.

28. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

offering for sale a software product identified in a virtual container in the assigned collection.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein:

offering for sale a software product includes offering an option for downloading the software product through the computer network.

30. The method of claim 28, wherein:

offering for sale a software product includes offering a sale coupon for the software product.

31. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

increasing the number of virtual containers in the assigned collection.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein:

increasing the number of virtual containers includes increasing the number of virtual containers if the users in the set earned a bonus for using the rented software product.

33. A method for renting software on-line, the method comprising:

selecting one or more software products that are available for rent from an on-line rental service through a computer network;

subscribing to a package offered by the on-line rental service, the package assigning a collection of virtual containers to one or more users;

placing the selected software products in one or more virtual containers in the collection to identify the selected software products as software products rented by the assigned users; and

allowing a user to access a software product if the software product is identified as a rented software product in a virtual container in the collection assigned to the user.

34. The method of claim 33, further comprising:

receiving authorization from the on-line rental service to access the rented software product.

35. The method of claim 33, wherein:

selecting one or more software products includes selecting a software game; and

allowing a user to access a software product includes allowing the user to play the selected software game.

36. A method for providing rental service through a computer network, the method comprising:

receiving a subscription for a user;

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the user according to the received subscription, wherein each virtual container in the collection is configured to identify one or more software products rented by the user;

receiving user input selecting one or more software products to be identified as rented software products in one or more virtual containers in the collection assigned to the user; and

authorizing the user to access a software product through the computer network if the software product is identified as a rented software product in one or more virtual containers of the collection assigned to the user.

37. A server system for renting software products through a computer network, the server system comprising:

a rental manager configured to assign a collection of virtual containers to a set of users including one or more users, wherein each virtual container in the collection is configured to identify one or more software products that are rented by users in the set, the

rental manager further configured to authorize users in the set to access a software product through the computer network based on whether the software product is identified as a rented software product in one or more virtual containers of the collection assigned to the set of users.

38. The server system of claim 37, wherein the software products include a plurality of software games, the server system further comprising:

an application engine configured to allow one or more users to play one or more software games in the plurality of software games if access to the one or more software games is authorized by the rental manager.

39. The server system of claim 37, further comprising:

a selection tool configured to select one or more software products for rent.

40. The server system of claim 38, wherein:

the selection tool is further configured to select a user subscription from a plurality of subscription models.

41. The server system of claim 38, wherein:

the selection tool is further configured to select from a plurality of purchase options.

42. The server system of claim 37, further comprising:

a system checking tool configured to determine whether a client system used by one or more of the users in the set is suitable for renting software products available from the server system.

43. The server system of claim 37, further comprising:

a payment manager configured to manage and record payments received for renting the software products.

44. A software product, tangibly embodied in a machine-readable medium, for providing rental service through a computer network, the software product comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to a set of users including one or more

users, each virtual container in the collection being configured to identify one or more software products that are rented by users in the set; and

authorizing a user in the set to access a software product through the computer network based on whether the software product is identified as a rented software product in one or more virtual containers of the collection assigned to the set of users.

45. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

identifying the rented software product in the virtual container for a rental period.

46. The software product of claim 45, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

removing the rented software product from the virtual container at the end of the rental period.

47. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

receiving a user subscription from a user in the set of users for renting software products,

wherein assigning a collection of virtual containers includes assigning the collection of virtual containers according to the user subscription.

48. The software product of claim 47, wherein:

assigning the collection of virtual containers according to the user subscription includes assigning a predetermined number of virtual containers for a subscription period.

49. The software product of claim 48, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

canceling the assignment of the collection of virtual containers at the end of the subscription period.

50. The software product of claim 44, wherein the computer network includes the Internet.

51. The software product of claim 44, wherein the rented software product includes game

software.

52. The software product of claim 44, wherein the rented software product includes educational or business software.

53. The software product of claim 44, wherein the rented software product includes electronic media content.

54. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

acquiring information about a client system connected to the computer network for using the rented software product,

wherein authorizing access includes authorizing access in accordance with the acquired information.

55. The software product of claim 54, wherein:

authorizing access in accordance with the acquired information includes denying access to the rented software product.

56. The software product of claim 54, wherein:

acquiring information about the client system includes determining whether the client system includes one or more personal computers and digital game devices.

57. The software product of claim 54, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

if access is authorized, providing access for the user in the set to use the rented software product such that a client portion of the rented software product runs in the client system while the user in the set uses the software product through the computer network.

58. The software product of claim 57, further comprising:

determining the client portion of the rented software product based on the acquired information about the client system.

59. The software product of claim 54, wherein:

acquiring information about the client system comprises acquiring information



describing a connection speed of the client device through the computer network.

60. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

providing a user interface for renting software products.

61. The software product of claim 60, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

in the user interface, receiving user input selecting a software product and placing the selected software product in a virtual container of the assigned collection to be identified as rented software product.

62. The software product of claim 60, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

in the user interface, presenting a software list including one or more items, each item representing a software product for rent; and

receiving user input selecting one or more items in the list.

63. The software product of claim 62, wherein:

receiving user input selecting one or more items in the software list includes receiving user input selecting one or more items in the software list based on one or more of genre, title, manufacturer, and system requirements.

64. The software product of claim 62, wherein:

presenting a software list includes presenting a software list based on one or more of alphabetical order of title, release date, and popularity of software products for rent.

65. The software product of claim 62, wherein:

presenting a software list includes presenting a software list based on a user profile.

66. The software product of claim 44, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one or more virtual containers for rentals having high priority.

67. The software product of claim 44, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one or more virtual containers for rentals having variable rental period.

68. The software product of claim 44, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning one or more virtual containers for rentals with limited content.

69. The software product of claim 44, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning a limited access virtual container that one or more users in the set of users cannot use to access software product.

70. The software product of claim 44, wherein:

assigning a collection of virtual containers to the set of users includes assigning a multi-player virtual container to be associated with multi-player games.

71. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

offering for sale a software product identified in a virtual container in the assigned collection.

72. The software product of claim 71, wherein:

offering for sale a software product includes offering an option for downloading the software product through the computer network.

73. The software product of claim 71, wherein:

offering for sale a software product includes offering a sale coupon for the software product.

74. The software product of claim 44, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

increasing the number of virtual containers in the assigned collection.

75. The software product of claim 74, wherein:

increasing the number of virtual containers includes increasing the number of virtual

containers if the users in the set earned a bonus for using the rented software product.

76. A software product, tangibly embodied in a machine-readable medium, for renting software on-line, the software product comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

- selecting one or more software products that are available for rent from an on-line rental service through a computer network;

- subscribing to a package offered by the on-line rental service, the package assigning a collection of virtual containers to one or more users;

- placing the selected software products in one or more virtual containers in the collection to identify the selected software products as software products rented by the assigned users; and

- allowing a user to access a software product if the software product is identified as a rented software product in a virtual container in the collection assigned to the user.

77. The software product of claim 76, further comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

- receiving authorization from the on-line rental service to access the rented software product.

78. The software product of claim 76, wherein:

- selecting one or more software products includes selecting a software game; and

- allowing a user to access a software product includes allowing the user to play the selected software game.

79. A software product, tangibly embodied in a machine-readable medium, for providing rental service through a computer network, the software product comprising instructions operable to cause one or more data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

- receiving a subscription for a user;

- assigning a collection of virtual containers to the user according to the received subscription, wherein each virtual container in the collection is configured to identify one or more software products rented by the user;

receiving user input selecting one or more software products to be identified as rented software products in one or more virtual containers in the collection assigned to the user; and  
authorizing the user to access a software product through the computer network if the software product is identified as a rented software product in one or more virtual containers of the collection assigned to the user.